

Chempro agrees to pay for probe at Pier 91 site

by Phyllis Winfield
Times staff reporter

Chempro, an oil treatment and recycling company, has agreed to finance an investigation of its Pier 91 facility after a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study expressed concerns about possible oil-related contamination of Elliott Bay.

Chempro's study will assess whether longtime industrial use of the site poses risks to human health and marine life and the environment.

A draft of the study must be submitted to the EPA by Sept. 4,

said Kate Tate, a Chempro spokeswoman.

Chempro approached the EPA with the idea for a study about two years ago after EPA tests of soil and ground water at the site showed traces of contamination, Tate said. The tests were prompted by reports of spills of oily liquids at the site, which is about 300 feet from Elliott Bay.

Soil samples and ground water-monitoring wells examined by previous studies have revealed contamination. No public ground water wells are at that site.

"The contamination is basically a result of historical use of that

site," Tate said. "We are basically correcting a problem that we inherited."

According to the EPA, oil spills at the site date back the 1930s, many before Chempro's occupancy.

The site, owned by the Port of Seattle, has been leased to Chempro since 1971. Chempro handles oil, reprocessed oil, coolant emulsions, industrial waste water and waste sludges. Some of those materials are recycled. The facility includes above-ground storage tanks and piping that connects the tank system.

According to EPA records, the

first tanks were built in the late 1920s for use in a gas refinery by the California Petroleum Co. The Port of Seattle has owned the property on an intermittent basis since at least 1931.

From 1941 to the early 1970s, the U.S. Navy assumed ownership of the tank system for use as a fuel and lubricating oil transfer station.

Chempro also plans to discuss the environmental study with neighborhood groups near the site on the northern shore of Elliott Bay. The part of the bay included in the study is near Magnolia, Interbay and Queen Anne Hill.

It's too early to tell whether

Elliott Bay has been contaminated by Chempro or other businesses operating at the industrial complex on Pier 91, said EPA spokeswoman Sylvia Burges. There are about eight businesses in that complex at the base of Magnolia Bridge.

There have been numerous oil and fuel spills this year in and around Pier 91, said Dan Cargill, a state Department of Ecology spokesman.

The EPA may ask Pacific Northern Oil Corp., a ship-fuel supplier that rents space from Chempro at Pier 91, to conduct a study of contamination at its site, Burges said.

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